

Misc

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HISTORICAL SKETCH
OF THE
Woman's Union Missionary Society

BY S. D. DOREMUS



I N the Spring of 1860, Mrs. Francis B. Mason, a missionary from Burmah, made a strong appeal to the "New York Female Bible Society" to organize work in heathen lands, exclusively for the Christianizing of heathen women. She claimed that the opportunity was unique, as the *zenanas* of India (places for women), barred for centuries to outside influence, had been opened for Christian instruction through Mrs. Mullens, an English lady.

As the "New York Female Bible Society" was local, the employment of Bible readers in heathen lands was outside of its province. But the appeal touched the heart of one of its members, Mrs. Thomas C. Doremus, who, in 1834, had listened to the powerful pleadings of Rev. David Abeel, for women out of the pale of Christian influence. During his missionary service in China, he had realized that no heathen nation could be Christianized, unless the women who influenced the home and guided the children, were in sympathy with the movement. A Society with this end in view was then planned, but as missions in this country were in their infancy, officers of existing Missionary Boards deemed the step premature, and the project was postponed.

The appeal of Mrs. Mason led Mrs. Doremus to see the possibilities of a new organization, and with the enthusiasm which had carried many benevolences to fruition, she held preliminary meetings to arouse interest in a new

Society for the evangelization of heathen women. She was elected its first President, a position for which her training as a child in foreign missions, her extensive acquaintance with missionaries of all denominations, and her wide experience in varied philanthropies eminently fitted her.

Mrs. Mason's efforts in many cities resulted in the formation of a band of nine women in Boston, in November, 1860, and in May, 1861, a Society in Philadelphia, both subsequently uniting as Branches with the organization in New York. The plans of a Society being completed, it was incorporated February, 1861, as the "WOMAN'S UNION MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF AMERICA FOR HEATHEN LANDS." Its platform was the employment of unmarried women, to Christianize heathen women who could not be reached by men. All evangelical denominations were to be represented in this Society, and its officers were to give voluntary service. Children were organized into Mission Bands, thus inaugurating a distinct form of service for the young.

To realize the stupendous obstacles to be overcome, it is necessary to glance at the conditions prevailing a half century ago. The departure was radical, as independent organizations of women were rare, public confidence must be created if financial support was to be secured, especially at a time when the country was in the throes of a Civil War, and new methods must be developed to overcome prejudice and persistent opposition. But the frail bark was launched, freighted with the courage of the initiative, perseverance and

hope, and the motto chosen for its banner was, "O woman, great is thy faith, be it unto thee even as thou wilt." A periodical was early issued in the interests of this new work, called "The Missionary Link," the object being to disseminate facts hitherto unknown or ignored, and to promote interest in the work.

In courtesy to Mrs. Mason, who had labored indefatigably to arouse public sentiment in this direction, Toungoo, Burmah, was the field selected for its first missionary, Miss S. H. Marston, who sailed November, 1861. Miss S. J. Higby and Miss S. S. Le Fevre were subsequently sent to the same land. During the first year of the Society's existence, four native Christian Bible women were employed in Burmah, India, and China, and aid was given to an independent teacher of girls in Japan.

In July, 1862, Miss H. G. Brittan was sent out as the first missionary from America, to the *zenanas* of India, where women were literally prisoners of a social custom dating from the Mohammedan invasion, 1001 A. D. This was a field thoroughly unknown to missionary effort in America.

Although the original plan had included single women missionaries, to be assigned to denominational fields, this was abandoned as inexpedient. A Mission Home, purchased in Calcutta, became the centre of activities embracing *zenana* visiting, village, evangelistic work, day schools for girls, an Orphanage and Hospital for women and children.

In 1868, a second home was purchased in Allahabad, a sacred city of India; in 1880, a third was secured in Cawnpore, and in 1900, a fourth at Jhansi. Here was established a Hospital known as the Mary S. Ackerman Hoyt Memorial.

This pioneer of woman's work commended itself to missionary wives and mothers in the foreign field, whose call for assistance was responded to, as far as a limited treasury permitted.

In 1869, this Society opened a mission in Peking, China, but the gift of premises from Mrs. E. C. Bridgman, a personal friend of Mrs. Doremus, led to its removal to Shanghai in 1881. In this city as one means for the evangelization of women the "Margaret Williamson Hospital" was established in 1884.

In 1871, the first Girl's Boarding School in Japan was opened in Yokohama by this Society. Subsequently a Bible School was added to the Mission equipment, as a training place for native evangelists employed throughout the Empire. The same year an appeal from Greece led to the establishment in Athens of a Girls' School, afterward removed to Cyprus. The success attending the Missions in India, China and Japan led to the concentration of forces in these lands, and the abandonment of Burmah and Greece.

Varied lines of work developed with the golden opportunities to win souls for Christ, and each in turn has been richly blessed of God, with fruits only eternity will

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reveal. As success proved the importance of woman's work in missions, Women's Societies were started in connection with denominational Boards, and thus was set in motion a mighty power for bringing Christ to the world.

Although the departure of denominations circumscribed the influence and limited the receipts of the Woman's Union Missionary Society, rich blessings still attended it, from donors who realized that there was a broad field for union work. Missionaries of rare ability and consecration have been connected with its work, who have moulded the varied departments of its Mission Stations into blessed influences.

Three factors called this work into being; unquestioning faith, devout prayer, and consecrated personal influence. These same elements amid countless discouragements, have still power used of God, to carry it on. We believe that no development of women in this country has made such strides as that promoted by the foreign missionary spirit.

The immense problem of heathenism and its attendant ills, is intensified as the years pass, and population increases. Every agency that can ameliorate these conditions is needed in this great warfare with sin and Satan. Surely then a work honored and blessed of God, as has been that of the "Woman's Union Missionary Society," cannot be abandoned in its tide of success. We ask for it a place in the forward Christian activities of the day, and the prayers of every one who daily utters the petition, "Thy Kingdom Come."

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